

Listen

A Seeker's Resource for Spiritual Direction

A P R I L 2 0 1 6

V O L 1 0 : I S S U E 2

FOUNDATIONS

Avehement shaking woke me from a deep sleep, a few hours into the tenth anniversary date of my son's death. I'd been feeling tender. And angry I still felt tender. My spiritual guide wisely invited me to treat myself with extra kindness throughout the anniversary week, and meet whatever emotions and sensations came ashore in me. At 1:30 a.m., seismic waves from a subducting Pacific Plate, deep in the Cook Inlet, Alaska, USA, reached my cozy log home built on a steep wooded hillside. A 7.1 earthquake began rumbling, violently.

Scrambling to wrap a fleece robe around my body, I stumbled into a *drop, cover, and hold on* position in a space beneath the stairs, screaming, "Come!" to my two dogs who had disappeared. Adrenaline pumped, sounds of shattering glass intermixed with thuds from the floor above me, and the twisting, creaking, and squealing of logs rocking and straining created a cacophony of chaos. *Keep breathing*, I told myself, *breathe*. I hugged myself tighter. *It's not stopping, it's getting worse*. At that moment, I didn't yet think I could die—that would come later. Huddling on a dog bed, alone in pitch darkness, commotion all around me, I breathed a cry of the heart prayer, *Please let me live. I want to live. Please let me live*.



Scarlet Ibis—*Eudocimus ruber*

The shaking began to subside, so I swiftly dressed in heavy winter boots and warm clothes, found eyeglasses and my cellular phone, then bolted upstairs to the front door. All I could think was, I must get the car out of the garage, it will be a safe place for the dogs. There will be aftershocks. My phone began ringing, text messages arrived questioning, "Are you okay?" No, I really wasn't—I was terrified and wide-eyed looking at the damage in my home. But decades of deep, rhythmic breathing and mindfulness I'd learned through meditation was at work in my wise body. I started contacting family members and friends. We listened to each other's experiences, assuring one another we were not alone.

When daylight arrived, my Dad and a friend showed up to offer assistance, clean up broken glass, and repair two oversize oak bookshelves which had face-planted to a carpeted floor,

spilling books, cracking photos and treasures. Fortunately, my home stood solid. Gazing into an aluminum bucket, I inspected fragments of glass and hand painted china I'd salvaged and would keep for a future mosaic project. The reveal: *I want to live*. Life takes form, then cracks, shatters, fragments, perhaps against our will. It's probable that something new can emerge.

Spiritual intelligence invites the questions, *What meaning will I give to this experience? What significance is present?* A spiritual director or spiritual guide who accompanies us with our curious questions and sensations will also invite us to meet the seen and unseen support which flows consistently though time and matter, and aid in creating firm foundations upon which we build our life.

—Pegge Erkeneff

SEEDS OF INTEREST:

- Field Guide: *Listen*
- Field Notes: *Over time, how has your prayer life and spiritual practice changed?*
- Poem: *The Path*
- Global Resources
- Ask Owl




❖ Soul-Searching ❖ Contemplation ❖ Rebuilding

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FIELD GUIDE



How do we learn to listen to inner longings and inspiration? It's simple: pay attention. Show up. Be still. Breathe deeply. Slow down. Listen. And where do we begin to listen? With our sacred stories—yours and mine—that continually unfold over time. Listen to the story of the universe. Listen to the world's beauty and hunger. Listen in the city, the wilderness, at home, with family, in community, and at the workplace. Listen to sorrow, to hope. Listen to mystery and the unknown. Most of all, listen to the present time.

How could you unplug today, for a short time, and listen? Will you?

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"What is my purpose?"
"Who can I become?"



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Listen is an outreach publication of Spiritual Directors International. When you visit the SDI website at www.sdiworld.org, you can learn about retreats, programs, conferences, and other educational events related to spiritual companionship. You can read descriptions of the spiritual direction relationship from a variety of spiritual traditions,

and discover excellent questions to ask yourself and any potential spiritual directors you choose to interview. To locate a spiritual director or guide, go online to *Seek and Find Guide: A Worldwide Resource of Available Spiritual Directors*. More than 6,000 spiritual directors are listed by geographical location at www.sdiworld.org.



OVER TIME, HOW HAS YOUR PRAYER LIFE AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICE CHANGED?

Spiritual Directors International members respond:

“When I was younger, my prayer was more focused on saying and praying the words of others. Regular times of meditation were also practiced, but the Mass, rosary, and *novenas* were stable parts of my life. Fortunately, I became part of a charismatic prayer group in the Roman Catholic church shortly after Vatican II. The experience helped me to understand that my words and feelings were important also, that God listened to my heart—and I didn’t have to get the words right or pray the prayer a certain number of times for my prayer to be acceptable to God. Centering Prayer, a prayer of intention rather than words, deepened and broadened this concept.

During times of crisis, not only my prayer changed, but my images for God changed as I searched for images that were more ‘acceptable’ internally, and matched what I believed and felt about God. I continue to be open and searching for expression to match my relationship with God. I am finding that new insights from scripture scholars match some of the things I wondered about, even as a child, but could never voice because it sounded as if I were questioning the church—and that was not acceptable. Now I believe that questions are good. Questions keep us growing. It is in the ‘evolutionary flow’ that I find God calling me, and waiting for me.” —Jo-Ann Jackowski, Ohio, USA

“Dance and the embodiment of grace, are now front and center as my primary form of prayer and leading others into prayer. So efficient, organic, and direct. Also, the power of the visual internet to connect my prayer life and make it very real to each other in body.” —Cynthia Winton-Henry, California, USA

“In a word, radically. I grew up viewing prayer as a burden to be gotten over as quickly as possible. In young adulthood I came to grasp the essential importance of prayer to the development of my spiritual life. I needed, therefore, a robust understanding of it. I’m grateful to the Christian tradition of saints who taught me to see prayer as an expression of my conversational partnership with the living God in Christ Jesus. Talking, asking for stuff (even good and selfless stuff) isn’t the main point. Being present to and with God is the point. I keep practicing being with God to listen and sometimes I respond.” —Jackie L. Smallbones, Iowa, USA

“My spiritual practice and my faith tradition is my constant home. What continues to grow over the years within my spiritual practice is my love and immersion in the Word of God, which nourishes me each day, my contemplative prayer, and my faith communities or relationships. God is surely tending to my heart with all of these desires. However, in the quiet time, when resting in Presence, I have come to an even deeper understanding—that through this intention, consent, rest, and adoration, comes a beautiful and spiritually eucharistic exchange: I offer myself to Him, and He to me. My prayer is to always participate with God, through Jesus and with the efficient companionship of the Holy Spirit, that I might deliver what has been gifted me, in ways that are good and aligned with God’s will; knowing this will be all around me in my personal life beginning with my family, ministry, and community. All of this constitutes my spiritual practice.” —Wanda L Gibson, Texas, USA

“In the early 2000s I was involved in a two-year spiritual formation group called the School of the Spirit—a Quaker program modeled after Shalem’s programs. I had been trying to hold together the old forms of daily prayer, reading scripture, and journaling. As I reported to my spiritual friendship or *koinania* group over those two years, they gently listened to me justify those spiritual practices which were no longer serving me. This led to a scary shift and what felt like a cliff. What was being called for was emptying ... in the form of meditation. It’s been over ten years now that a regular meditation practice has evolved in my life. And, I have come to understand that I continue to carry prayers in my heart, have expanded my range of readings and write about topics that speak from the heart, but might not be considered ‘spiritual.’ All of the practices I’ve ever had continue to operate within me through the door of meditation. What is so beautiful is that I have been opened to a deeper listening of the sacred pulse in all life that exists in the midst of silence—and what feels like the presence of the Divine. Who knew?” —Diane Younkings, Maryland, USA

“Probably the most significant changes in my prayer and spiritual life are due to my learning to listen to my own experience and inner yearnings. My image of who God is has unraveled gradually as I grew deeper in the ministry of faith formation. Happily, as I near some measure



FIELD NOTES, CONTINUED

of retirement, I find that God's presence and the holy mystery continue to unfold for me." —Ellen F. Dunn, OP, West Virginia, USA

"I think the best way to describe my life of spiritual practice is with the word, rhythm. Many years ago, I was introduced to The Five Rhythms, a kind of expressive soul dancing that integrates the rhythms of life: feminine, masculine, chaos, liberation, celebration, and stillness. To this day, I am grateful to Gabrielle Roth, the inspiration behind The Five Rhythms. My experience has been that all of life falls into one of these rhythms, and the spiritual life is no exception. *The Wave* as she called the series, continues and repeats, washing over us, under us, and through us as we move about our days, our weeks, our years. The potential for connection with the Divine simmers in each moment, transitioning to the next, and building into the blissful union that we seek, if we are open and ready to receive it. So, my life is not a completely blissful and integrated daily communion with the Sacred One, but the rhythms of my spiritual practices keep me tethered; moving and swaying, but never disconnecting. At this time in my life, I am enjoying more of a liberated and celebratory rhythm, following a more chaotic period of my life. This morning I relished in *stillness* at our morning meditation group and often find the rhythm of *feminine* showing up when I am in nature or *masculine* when I am preparing for a ceremonial fire. The rhythm of *chaos* induces me to seek justice in the world and keeps me from being complacent. On the outside, some of my spiritual practices have changed and some have remained constant, but the rhythms inherent in each of them are the greatest source of my spiritual deepening." —Bonnie Burton Nalley, Illinois, USA

"It began with a whisper that intensified into an overwhelming realization: If I thought I could maintain a vibrant relationship with God without spending time in His presence, I was sorely mistaken. I was pretty much fed up with the anemic spirituality into which I had slipped over time. It seemed that if God truly had not changed, that I should be able to experience Him more fully, as did the Old Testament saints. I wanted a life with God, with Him daily, deeply, and devotedly. It occurred to me that the only way to get to know God more deeply was to spend more time with Him, and that time should be spent listening rather than always talking, soaking rather than skimming the surface. So I dove in and went to a weekend silent retreat. I found it truly amazing that as soon as I shut up, God was quick to speak, to show me things, and to affirm me with His love. I realized that life with God was all about the journey together, and not nearly as much about where I ended up in the end. After all,

eternal life by definition is infinite in both directions; it is not something only attained after death, but is something to be experienced—life in God's presence—to a large extent here and now. That realization, of course, turned my former dull and dry prayer practices upside down. I no longer focus on how far I have to go, but rather enjoy focusing on my Lord and His ways, listening, trusting, and trying to do the things He is doing in and around me. Prayer and spiritual practices are vehicles through which God and I journey through life together, He the Master and I the apprentice. Of course, I have just scratched the surface; but God is there in the midst, and slowly my perspectives are turning to be a little more like His." —Gini Downing, California, USA

"My prayer life has advanced. Each day now, time is spent in scripture reading and prayer. Sometimes it is beneficial to simply 'sit with the Lord' allowing thoughts to exchange between us. Often, I write in a journal what is heard. This allows a different way of looking at a life's happenings day-by-day. Of course, I pray throughout the day and before each client I see for spiritual mentoring and mental health counseling. The changes experienced within the past several years, see me able to accomplish more in less time. Overall, changes in my spiritual practices see my heart grow softer, more loving. At the same time, I am able to speak with more openness and honesty when confrontation is needed within family and friends. This was not easy to do previously, as loved ones do not want us to change. Still, walking more closely with God has changed me." —Joy L. Smith, Arizona, USA

REFLECT: HOW HAS YOUR SPIRITUAL PRACTICE OR COMMUNITY SHIFTED AND GROWN THROUGH TIME? WHAT IS FOUNDATIONAL FOR YOU?

Listen

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The Path

*The soul is like an uninhabited world
that comes to life only when
God lays (God's) head
against us.*

Translation of poem by Saint Thomas Aquinas,
by Daniel Ladinsky

I have tried
to align my life
with The Path,
though it has a nasty
way of jogging
and turning
without reason
or warning.
Consulting mystics,
and reading masters
of several faith traditions
has helped not at all.
But I believe
I may have found
a clue, even a guide,
though I know not
the wisdom intended.
Our Border Collie, Kerry,
crouches flat against
the kitchen floor,
brown eyes locked
with mine, whenever
I speak on the phone.
The minute I end the call,
he spins in frantic,
counter-clockwise circles,
yelping in ecstasy,
then once more
belly to floor, growls
till I place my face
against his black-and-white head,
close to the black patch
over his right eye
which makes him look
like a cross between
Moshe Dayan and Sinbad.

—Jennifer (Jinks) Hoffmann

ASK OWL

Question: "How often do people meet with a spiritual guide? And, sometimes when I meet with my spiritual guide a long silence erupts, and I become uncomfortable. What should I do if this happens again?"



fidget. In spiritual direction, silence can be beneficial. Silence allows us to listen to what we may be afraid to speak, or to our story unfolding with new revelation. Silence allows us to digest reality. Silence may be an opportunity to become available to the present moment of here and now, imbued with love, healing, and mystery.

Hoot Hoot: Thank you for your excellent and common questions. Generally speaking, people meet with a spiritual guide once every four to six weeks. If a person is making a guided retreat, meeting times might be more frequent. Some spiritual directors and directees mutually schedule the next date at the conclusion of a meeting time. Others conclude, depart, and then later the seeker contacts the spiritual director when he or she is ready for another time to meet for spiritual direction. Talk with your spiritual director to determine the best fit for you. The amount of time between meetings is flexible and may shift during different times of your life, depending on life circumstances.

Your questions about silence are good ones. Often we do not appreciate the gift of silence. We chatter, speak quickly, internally ponder what to do next, or

The next time you experience an awkward silence, consider naming it aloud to your spiritual director. Or, try to breathe deeply with peace, knowing the one who occupies the third chair may be inviting you and your guide to understanding, reverence, or wise action. Be still, and listen with an open heart. 🦉

—If you have a question for Owl, please e-mail Listen@sdiworld.org.

TIP: Watch one or more of the short videos in the "SDI Learns From..." video series on YouTube and the SDI website. You can watch from a laptop, tablet, computer, or smart phone. There are more than a hundred videos on the SDIworld YouTube channel. Spiritual teachers and guides from the SDI global learning community offer their wisdom, including how to seek and find a spiritual director. The topics will help provide guidance to questions and inquiry. In fact, watching the videos might give you a sample of what it would be like to meet with a spiritual director!

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“Tending the holy around the world and across traditions ...

Al servicio de lo sacro alrededor del mundo y a través de las tradiciones ...”

—Translated by Marta Rios and Xavier Ortiz Monasterio

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